

The Heart Work of Wikipedia

Gendered and Emotional Labor in the World's Largest
Online Encyclopedia

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Wikipedia's gender gap

22.7% of US adult editors are female (Hill & Shaw, 2013)

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Why does the gender gap matter?

Content coverage

Information bias

Gatekeeping

Access and equality

It's not a woman problem

- Lack of discretionary time (Collier & Bear, 2012)
- Desire to avoid conflict and criticism (Collier & Bear, 2012)
- Lack of technical skills (Gardner, 2011)
- Tendency to be more social and/or pro-social (Lam et al., 2011)



Photo by Thomas Uhlemann via Wikimedia Commons

“But no one has talked to the women who actually are on Wikipedia.”

Adrienne Wadewitz

Who speaks for the women of Wikipedia? Not the women of Wikipedia. HASTAC. (2013)



Who are the women
of Wikipedia?

What motivates
them to edit?

How do they
perceive the gender
gap?

Photo by National Photo Company via Wikimedia Commons

Participant interviews

20 English language (EN)
Wikipedia editors who self-identify
as female and have been editing
for 18 months or more

15 editors have been editing for
7+ years

Range of ages (19 to mid 60s),
relationship statuses, gender
identities, and nationalities

Semi-structured interviews
conducted in-person, via phone,
email, IM, and telephony
applications (e.g., Skype and
Google Hangouts)





How much do smiles cost?

Photo by SAS Scandinavian Airlines via Wikimedia Commons

Emotional labor

Arlie Hochschild (1979)



Photo courtesy of WNYC

Feeling rules

“We feel. We try to feel. We want to try to feel. The social guidelines that direct how we want to try to feel may be describable as **a set of socially shared, albeit often latent (not thought about unless probed at), rules.**” (563)

“By ‘feeling rules’ I refer to **guidelines for the assessment of fits and misfits between feeling and situation.**” (566)

Hochschild, A. Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure, *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol 85, No. 3 (November 1979), 551-575.



WP:Civility

“Someone may very well be an idiot. But telling them so is neither going to increase their intelligence nor improve your ability to communicate with them.”

WP:Assume good faith

“When doubt is cast on good faith, continue to assume good faith yourself when possible.”

WP:Don’t be a dick

“Being a dick isn't equivalent to being uncivil or impolite (though incivility and rudeness often accompany dickery). One may be perfectly civil and follow every rule of etiquette and still be a dick.”

*We're girls on the Internet. **We've got to be manly.** It's because that's criticizing something I actually give a fuck about, whereas the background noise of people telling me I have nice tits is like, okay. But I feel like it should be the other way around. I feel like people criticizing my work should be less hurtful. But it is what it is.*

P1

*There's messages that women editors—you get told again and again, even on Wikipedia, “**Stop behaving like a woman; start behaving like a human.**” When you're told “Man up,” you're reinforced with the idea that the only acceptable model for behavior on Wikipedia is to behave like a man, which is to ignore all the bullshit.*

P2

*My personal point of view is that, on Wikipedia, if you're harassed, there's an **expectation that you will behave like a saint**. You cannot give into any of the provocation because if you give into the provocation, you can be blocked. And, if somehow on Wikipedia you manage to successfully deal with the harasser [...] the problem is that you cannot talk about success stories. Because in talking about success stories dealing with women's harassment on Wikipedia, you empower the harassers. And that's the view that's being consistently said again and again and again.*

P2

Emotion work

“By ‘emotion work,’ I refer to the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling . . . [it] refers to the effort—the act of trying—and not to the outcome, which may or may not be successful.” (561)

“We actively try to manage what we feel in accordance with latent rules.” (571)

The labor of acting

Surface acting

to mask affective displays without quelling the feelings beneath them

Deep acting

to alter both the display as well as the originating emotion itself

Surface acting

*[There was] one time my sex was used against me in a way that did hurt me. I would appreciate it if you didn't [share the details] **because I don't like to show weakness**. We have have a term for that on Wikipedia. We call it beans.*



Photo by Greg Westfall via Wikimedia Commons

Reframing emotional labor as ideological gain?

*For me, it is personally very satisfying to know that I am a contributing force to the sum of all human knowledge. [...] It's not that I romanticize the concept of Wikipedia, but I find it very fascinating that **I am a contributing force to something that aims to be the sum of all human knowledge.***

P11

*The way I can reach the most people, and **it means a lot to me to have a voice**. Like, that was what brought me in the first place. You know, I was 12, and I was a girl. So—and I was bullied in school. So, I really, really didn't have a voice in real life. A lot of the time I was really marginalized and that sucked. It [Wikipedia] was a place where I was taken on my own merits, you know?*

P1



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